

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

06 September 2013

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Thomas, S. (2013) 'The Gaucho sells out : Thomas Pynchon and Argentina.', *Studies in American fiction.*, 40 (1). pp. 53-85.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/saf.2013.0003>

Publisher's copyright statement:

Copyright © 2013 The Johns Hopkins University Press. This article first appeared in *Studies in American fiction*, 40(1), 53-85.

Additional information:

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

The Gaucho Sells Out: Thomas Pynchon and Argentina

Samuel Thomas
University of Durham

Am turning into an Argentinophile, if not maniac. Never having been within a couple thousand miles of the place has still not kept me from developing a theory . . .

—Pynchon, letter to Faith and Kirkpatrick Sale, Jun. 29, 1963.

Nationalism is the greatest evil of all. And of course the unequal distribution of material goods, that is wrong also, and the division of land in different countries. It makes for war, arbitrary distinctions. You see I'm really a student of Spencer, an old anarchist . . .

—Jorge Luis Borges to Uki Goñi, *Buenos Aires Herald*, Feb. 6, 1981.

Pero ché, no sós argentino . . .

—*Gravity's Rainbow*.¹

In chapter seven of Pynchon's first novel—one of the “Stencilized” sections of the book in which the avatars and emanations of the mysterious V. are traced out through moments of historical crisis—we are taken on a lavish detour to Florence, circa 1899. Amidst the various and intricate plotlines here, rumours of a seditious figure known only

as “The Gaucho” are causing much consternation at the Venezuelan Consulate. A communiqué has arrived from Rome, “warning of an upswing in revolutionary activities”—a particular concern given the small but feisty colony of Venezuelan expatriates in the north-eastern part of the city. We learn that this “‘ogre’” (as he is called by Vice-Consul Salazar), is himself a Venezuelan national, who may (or may not) be operating in line with an insurgent agenda in his homeland.² It is the Gaucho who co-ordinates a group of rioting Venezuelans—ultimately met with lethal force by the army—during an attempt to steal Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* from the Uffizi gallery. A self-proclaimed “‘man of action’” (161) with an enthusiasm for explosives, the Gaucho cites Machiavelli’s “‘final exhortation’” of the strength of the lion as his moral inspiration: “‘an embodiment of power . . . as simple and honest as my own and my comrades’ in South America’” (163). This peculiar interpretation of Machiavellian doctrine is embellished with plenty of Latin machismo and a flair for dramatic spectacle: the Gaucho “wear[s] a red shirt and a wide grin” as he leads his band of rioters to the Consulate on horseback (207). Before these events come to a head, Salazar attempts to calm his panicked chief by pouring water on the credibility of the hearsay: “‘Gauchos are in Argentina . . . And the name might also be a corruption of the French gauche. Perhaps he is left-handed’” (176). Somewhat curiously, no connection is made to the fact that Venezuela has its own distinctive equivalent to the Argentine cowboy in the form of the *llanero*—herders from the tropical grasslands to the east of the Andes (or *llanos*), many of whom played an important role in the latter stages of the anti-Spanish uprisings led by Simón Bolívar.³ The possibility of a tangible link to Argentina is therefore blocked and left open at the same time; with the end of the chapter comes the end of the Florentine narrative and Pynchon’s strange, inauthentic Gaucho is never mentioned again. The nine passing references to tango in *V.*, the dance that spread into European high society from the Buenos Aires underworld, might faintly evoke images of Argentina (albeit of the urban sprawl against which the free-roaming life of the gaucho is defined), but that is as close as we get to a follow-up.⁴

If, however, Pynchon famously plays with the resonances of the letter V in the novel—Vheissu, Vesuvius, Victoria, Venezuela, Venus and so on—then the presence of the Gaucho figure, with the specifically Argentine meaning of that term in mind,⁵ at least means that we can add to this alliterative sequence: Why not V for *Voseo*, the most notable feature of the Ríoplatense Spanish spoken in Argentina, in which *vos* (the second person singular pronoun) is used instead of *tú*?⁶ And why not speculate as to some hidden logic behind Pynchon’s depiction of the Gaucho given the complex historical ties between Argentina, neighbouring Uruguay and Italy (with his red shirt recalling Garibaldi’s guerilla campaign and with both Latin American nations serving as a destination for scores

of Italian migrants over several centuries)? While this might appear to be clutching at straws, perhaps even succumbing a little to the associative craziness that afflicts Herbert Stencil, Pynchon's description of himself as an "Argentinophile, if not maniac" in a letter of 1963 (the year in which *V.* was published) points to why it is worth entertaining such notions.⁷ The Gaucho—even if he barely lives up to his sobriquet—hints at a serious, enduring interest in Argentina, an interest in both its *ficciones* and its *realidades*, which has had a major impact on the development of Pynchon's work. It is the particularities of this interest—intellectual and emotional, aesthetic and geopolitical, from the Borgesian labyrinth of the capital to the vast expansiveness of *la pampa*—which provide the critical framework for this analysis.

Revisiting the Gaucho enigma in *V.* therefore demonstrates that Argentina has exerted some sort of a pull on Pynchon's imagination from the very beginning of his career as a novelist.⁸ This relatively fleeting image of a Latin American in Europe—"a Nostromo in reverse" as John Dugdale notes⁹—prepares the ground for significant parts of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which draws on material that is unequivocally rooted in Argentina and Argentine cultural politics. Thus, while Argentina is spoken by name only once in Pynchon's debut, the Gaucho can be read as a sort of precursor to the eccentric band of bona fide Argentines who appear for several episodes in his most wondrous and recalcitrant book. These Argentine characters are anarchists (a philosophy that continues to leave an indelible mark on Pynchon's writing)¹⁰ who have fled their homeland in an "early-vintage" U-boat hijacked at the port of Mar del Plata (263). Intriguingly, it is Mar del Plata where a number of U-boats were interned by the Argentine authorities a few months after V-E Day following the confusion caused by *Operation Regenbogen* (or "Rainbow," the codename for the dispersal of the German submarine fleet), which thus exposes an undiscovered nuance in the novel's title—a fugitive (and potentially malevolent) *scattering* to match the familiar sense of parabolic thrust.¹¹ Just as many Nazis sought refuge in Latin America after the Axis defeat, Pynchon's anarchists are drawn in the opposite direction to the chaotic energy of "the Zone"—that weird space otherwise known as post-war Germany in 1945, yet to be remapped by the victorious powers, in which an extravagant variety of fantasies and nightmares take hold. "'You say *Germany*?'" exclaims Slothrop after meeting Francisco Squalidozzi at the Odeon café in Zürich. "'You gone goofy? It's a mess there Jackson!'" To which the "sad Argentine" tellingly replies: "'Not nearly the mess we left back home'" (263). Disillusioned by the rise of Perón (whose agents, we are told, are on their tail), Squalidozzi's group are motivated by a passionate, rather crazed attachment to Argentina's rich and contested *gauchesco* tradition, which provides the imaginative gloss to their "anarchism-in-exile" (265). In his book-length essay *Radiografía de la Pampa* (1933),

the poet Ezequiel Martínez Estrada talks of “the unfolding of the infinite within” that defined the Argentine wilderness before it was tamed, “the land where man is alone, like an abstract being that will begin anew the story of the species—or conclude it.”¹² And it is something resembling the utopian, tellurical force described by Martínez Estrada (who was himself a fierce opponent of *Perónismo*) that Pynchon’s gaucho anarchists attribute to the providential “openness of the German Zone” (265). As Richard Slatta explains, while gauchos effectively “disappeared as a recognizable social group in the last third of the nineteenth century”—beaten back by war, land reforms and strategic Europeanization—all manner of “literary and symbolic evocations” would flourish in the twentieth, with the romantic myth of the gaucho replacing lived experience.¹³ It is this very process that Pynchon observes, critiques, and in some senses, contributes to himself: irreverent, as is to be expected, but with a special emphasis on the price of freedom which the anarchists must negotiate, on the fraught politics of “gaucho dignity” (384).

Beyond and connected to this gaucho fixation, examining the presence of Argentina in *Gravity’s Rainbow* takes us deeper into the remarkable composition of Pynchon’s novel. He provides various meditations, both poetic and comedic, on the “neuroses” and “manias” of the anarchists (264, 383), terms that perhaps gesture toward the unique way in which psychoanalysis found such a receptive audience in Argentina (Buenos Aires even has a neighbourhood known as “Villa Freud” because of its astonishing concentration of psychoanalysts).¹⁴ He embroiders his portrayal of the “terminal” homesickness that afflicts the anarchists with casual but finely wrought observations about “the smell of freshly brewed *maté* after a bitter day at the racetrack” (385).¹⁵ He reflects on the “reluctant poignancy” of Argentine Spanish—“full of quiet damped *ss* and palatal *ys*”—with the extraordinary suggestion that it is “brought along through years of frustration, self-censorship, long roundabout evasions of political truth—of bringing the State to live in the muscles of your tongue” (384). When the tango is evoked—not only mentioned previously in *V.*, but also in *The Crying of Lot 49* during a ballroom scene at a deaf-mute convention¹⁶—the reference is to the very particular dance-hall sounds of *el Rey del Compás* (or “King of the Beat”) Juan D’Arienzo and no longer merely generic (267).¹⁷ Last but not least, there are allusions, quotations and theorizations relating to three of Argentina’s most influential writers—Jorge Luis Borges, Leopoldo Lugones, and José Hernández (three very different writers who are nonetheless bound together, as I will later explore, in the troubled maturation of Argentine literature and nationhood). Hernández, of course, is the author of the epic gauchesco poem *Martín Fierro* (1872), a thrilling and tragic howl written in rural dialect which championed the plight of the gaucho at a time when Argentina’s urban elite were mounting a sustained campaign against the “barbarism” of

its rural population.¹⁸ Moreover, the contrasting interpretations of the poem by Lugones and Borges—of its rage, its drama, its ambiguities—were to prove instrumental in the evolution of the gaucho's status in Argentine culture. It is a movie version of *Martín Fierro* that the anarchists agree to create with Gerhardt "der Springer" von Göll in the Zone, with the German director (and unashamed profiteer) gripped by the "controlled ecstasy of megalomania" after coming to believe that his films have the power to "sow the seeds of reality" (388). "'Tell me, Squalidozzi,'" he asks with no little sense of cynicism, "'are you too pure for this? Or could your anarchist project use a little help?'" (386).

With the fortieth anniversary of *Gravity's Rainbow* on the horizon, it is therefore not surprising that many aspects of this Argentine material have attracted a substantial amount of debate and exegesis, which I shall duly address as appropriate. Indeed, some of the most lasting and insightful readings of the novel touch on the significance of Pynchon's displaced gaucho anarchists in one way or another, and a lyrical passage in which Squalidozzi attempts to articulate the "'perversity and guilt'" of "'the Argentine heart'" to a bemused Slothrop has become a kind of hyper-canonical quotation. "'We are obsessed with building labyrinths,'" he explains, "'where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet . . . Look at Borges. Look at the suburbs of Buenos Aires.'" But hidden beneath this, we are crucially informed, lies a profound, traumatic longing "'for a return to that first unscribbled serenity'" (264).¹⁹ However, one of the odd things about the critical discussion of Pynchon's "mania" for all things Argentine—if a certain amount of generalization can be forgiven at this stage—has been a notable reluctance to look it squarely in the face. This can be explained by two key factors. Firstly, scholars have been uncertain as to the precise historical sources that may have informed the development of the Argentine narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Compared to the serious inroads that have been made into the novel's engagement with, say, the Herero genocide or Kirghiz oral tradition under Soviet alphabet reform, Pynchon's Argentine reading list (beyond the literary texts he explicitly references) has thus far remained largely mysterious. So while we can confidently state that Pynchon borrows images and information from Stephen Graham's *Through Russian Central Asia* (1916),²⁰ the same level of contextual exactitude has not been applied to Pynchon's detours into the pampa. Secondly, there has been a tendency to subsume Pynchon's Argentinisms into some broader thematic concern or theoretical stratagem—anarchism, film, the influence of Borges, expansive poststructuralist readings of the interplay between history and fiction, the list goes on.²¹ In the particular case of Pynchon's debt to Borges, this has perhaps been exacerbated, despite an *insistent* stress on the latter's country of origin, by what Ernesto Livon-Grosman has called the construction "of the international Borges." Analogous

to versions of Joyce or Kafka which privilege universal questions about textuality and the philosophy of language, and typically reinforced by a deterritorialized model of postmodernism, this process has created a “cultural figure without national boundaries who, consequently, is perceived to be the least Argentine of all Argentine intellectuals.”²²

While these studies make crucial contributions to Pynchon scholarship, this paper seeks to address some of the gaps and imbalances that have accumulated here. Most central to this, however, is the new light shed on the composition of *Gravity's Rainbow* as a result of research carried out at *la Biblioteca Nacional* in Buenos Aires and at el CeDInCI (or el Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas en la Argentina), which houses microfilm resources relating to the history of Argentine anarchism and anti-fascism in the 1930s and 40s. This archival work has two distinct functions in terms of the direction of my argument. On one level, it uncovers and verifies some of the unique Argentine materials that Pynchon incorporates into the novel. On another, it helps in developing a fully-realised sense of geopolitical context and a nuanced take on Argentina's role in the novel's diverse landscapes and mindscapes. In addition, my project draws on three of the eight personal letters, one of which I have already alluded to, in the Pynchon collection at the Harry Ransom Center. Written during an extended stay in Mexico, these precious glimpses into Pynchon's development as a novelist date from 1963 to 1964 and are addressed to Kirkpatrick Sale, an academic and activist, and Sale's wife, Faith (who would go on to become a prominent literary editor). Faith, in fact, is an especially relevant part of this story: she worked (in an unspecified role) on the 1961 edition of *New World Writing*, the US journal which published the first English language translation of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” one of Borges's most fêted works. “The piece haunted me,” Pynchon explains with conversational straightforwardness, “because I couldn't tell if it was ‘ficción’ or not.”²³ These letters are of course fascinating documents in themselves—covering topics such as Charles de Gaulle's visit to Mexico City and the wedding of Richard Fariña (to whom *Gravity's Rainbow* is dedicated)—but they serve a particular purpose in this case by opening up some vital aspects of Pynchon's imaginative journey into Argentine culture. Although Borges is certainly the dominant reference point in this respect, the letters also feature brief remarks on Eduardo Mallea, Bioy Casares, Julio Cortázar, Silvina Ocampo, and the economist Raúl Prebisch.²⁴ Indeed, Pynchon goes so far as to joke about realizing his “true vocation” as a critic and writing “the definitive work on XX Argentine Lit.”²⁵ This is not to suggest, however, that gathering together this diverse selection of materials can somehow provide a fixed “solution” to the Argentine mysteries in *Gravity's Rainbow* or a definitive reading of how Argentina fits into the novel's enduringly strange relays between order and chaos. The discovery

that “The Kenosha Kid,” for example, is actually lifted from pulp Western stories—for so long a great puzzle akin to the “Macintosh” figure at Paddy Dignam’s funeral in *Ulysses*—does not fully account for the way in which Pynchon both respects and violates his sources.²⁶ What this approach *can* achieve though is a more accurate, intimate picture of what it is in *Argentinidad* (or “Argentineity”) that plays such an important role in shaping the form and content of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. It can also, I contend, open up a compelling way of analyzing the relationship between creativity and the political that underpins Pynchon’s novel. With this in mind, *Gravity’s Rainbow* has rightly been lauded as a fantastically “impure”²⁷ work that crosses boundaries of many kinds—of genre, of intellectual disciplines, of taste—and it can quite legitimately be viewed as a kind of “post-national” nexus of world literatures. But at the same time, this does not militate against an investigation of its painstakingly researched *national* registers—even if literary fiction, as Sascha Pöhlmann notes, is so frequently conceptualized as “an exemplary site for challenging the hegemony of nation-ness.”²⁸ It is, after all, a novel that is acutely conscious of the power of boundaries to reassert themselves, often with violent and terrifying consequences, at the very moment when they appear to have been transcended. It also places an uncompromising emphasis on our complicity in such processes. As the eponymous hero of *Martín Fierro* testifies, “*nos llevan los rigores*” (“we take on our difficulties”) and we must decide if they will carry us along.²⁹ The specificity of my archival/contextual discussion is therefore situated within this broader series of debates.

La Revolución

The first reference to Argentina in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the scene I have previously mentioned, in which Squalidozzi cuts a deal with Slothrop at the Odeon in Zürich—the renowned café once frequented by Lenin, Joyce and Einstein. As Slothrop sits down and waits with his coffee, the following sequence unfolds:

Fifteen minutes and he’s getting the spy-sign from a swarthy, curly-headed alien in a green suit a couple tables away. Another front-facer. On his table is an old newspaper that appears to be in Spanish. It is open to a peculiar political cartoon of a line of middle-aged men wearing dresses and wigs, inside the police station where a cop is holding a loaf of white . . . no it’s a baby, with a label on its diaper sez LA REVOLUCIÓN . . . oh, they’re all claiming the infant revolution as their own, all these politicians bickering like a bunch of putative mothers, and somehow this cartoon here is supposed to be some kind of a touchstone, this fella in the green suit, who turns out to be an Argentine named Francisco Squalidozzi, is looking for a reaction . . . the key passage is at the very end of the line

where the great Argentine poet Leopoldo Lugones is saying, “Now I’m going to tell you, in verse, how I conceived her free from the stain of Original Sin. . . .” It is the Uriburu revolution of 1930. The paper is fifteen years old. There is no telling what Squalidozzi is expecting from Slothrop, but what he gets is pure ignorance. (263)

This “peculiar political cartoon” has never been identified within existing scholarship, including Steven Weisenburger’s *Companion* and the brilliant, highly specialised work published in *Pynchon Notes*. And without confirmation that the image and the quotation are verifiable, it would appear that there are only limited options available to us beyond chasing up historical information on the Uriburu revolution (about which more will be said shortly). We might, however, productively link this scene to the moment in *The Crying of Lot 49* when another anarchist from south of the US border, the Mexican Jesús Arrabal, presents Oedipa with a copy of the anarcho-syndicalist newspaper *Regeneración*, dated 1904. Arrabal, whose surname is actually *lunfardo* slang and indeed the title of a poem by Borges,³⁰ then goes on to speculate as to whether the document has been in the mail for sixty years—therefore allowing us to locate the present time of the novel in 1964,³¹ just as Squalidozzi’s newspaper confirms that we are in 1945.³² We might also attempt to forge connections with Pynchon’s wider attraction to various forms of cartooning and animation, which in *Gravity’s Rainbow* stretches from Porky Pig to the German caricaturist Wilhelm Busch.³³ In fact, it is the history of cartooning that places us on the right track here. Experience shows that even the most outlandish features of Pynchon’s work tend to have some sort of textual/archival point of origin and—for the first time—it can now be demonstrated that this scene draws on an actual cartoon (Fig. 1).

The cartoon is drawn by Ramón Columba, an important figure in the development of Argentine cartoon art and political satire. After beginning his career as a parliamentary stenographer, Columba would go on to draw comics for publications such as *La Razón* and *Caras y Caretas*—both of which can still be purchased from Argentine *kioskos* today.³⁴ Columba was also the founder of *El Tony*, the nation’s first dedicated comics magazine, and there is even film footage of Columba meeting Walt Disney during his visit to Argentina in 1941, who was so inspired by his Latin American adventures that he went on to make the short animation *El Gaucho Goofy* (1943).³⁵ This particular image, however, comes from *Páginas de Columba*, a periodical that the enterprising artist created in 1922. If we discount the possibility that Pynchon followed in Disney’s footsteps in the ten years between his correspondence with Kirkpatrick and Faith Sale and the publication of *Gravity’s Rainbow*,³⁶ it is likely that he encountered the image in an anthology entitled *La Caricatura Política Argentina* (1960) edited by Amadeo Dell’Acqua (an artist and illustrator himself), which



Fig. 1. *Páginas de Columba*, Sept. 1930. Reproduced courtesy of La Biblioteca Nacional, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

is listed in the UCLA and New York Public Libraries (widely accepted to be Pynchon's primary research hubs during this period).³⁷

With this core information established, a number of questions begin to emerge. What exactly does *Columba's* cartoon show us? And why does it figure as "some kind of a touchstone" for Squalidozzi? What is the specific (and indeed broader) relevance of the Uriburu revolution? And why does Pynchon single out Leopoldo Lugones—not actually "at the very end of the line," as is stated, but roughly halfway among the various identifiable personages, seven of whom are given speech bubbles?³⁸ First of all, it needs to be explained that the ascent of General José Félix Uriburu on 6 September 1930 saw the end of the presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen, re-elected for his second stint in office only two years prior to Uriburu's *coup d'état*. As David Rock summarizes, Argentina's "long burst of economic expansion" came to an abrupt end with the onset of the Great Depression. In this context, Yrigoyen's government found itself unable to maintain the heavy spending that had sustained much of its popularity with the middle classes and equally unable to meet the demands of the elite, who sought an aggressive curtailment of the state sector.³⁹ Moreover, a lack of institutional reform had left Yrigoyen vulnerable to entrenched conservative power structures in place since colonial times, and his grip on office was further undermined by the fracturing of his own Radical party (the UCR). As

Luis Alberto Romero explains, the deposition of Yrigoyen—a “secular saint” for some, yet a senile charlatan and “an expression of democracy’s worst vices” for others—represents a turning point in the turbulent life of the Republic: “It would be another sixty-one years before an elected president would peacefully transfer power to his successor.”⁴⁰ Thus began a period in Argentine history known as *la Década Infame*, an “oligarchic” restoration that preceded the explosive programme of social reform and industrialization brought about by the *Perónistas*,⁴¹ who are of such concern to Squalidozzi in 1945: “He [Perón] already has the *descamisados* [literally, the shirtless ones], this will give him the Army too you see . . . it’s only a matter of time . . .” (263). Returning, however, to Uriburu, one of the definitive features of this “revolutionary” moment is the uneasy, multifaceted coalition that came together in order to depose Yrigoyen—hence the undignified gaggle of “putative mothers” in the cartoon, each of them “claiming the infant revolution as their own.” Though united in their hostility toward the Radical administration, they were strange bedfellows in all other respects, as Columba rather brilliantly conveys. On one level, the most obvious split was between an extreme right nationalist faction led by Uriburu himself, “authoritarian and corporatist,”⁴² heavily influenced by Italian fascism, and liberal conservatives led by General Agustín Justo, pictured in the cartoon toward the back of the line, who would replace Uriburu as president in 1932. To complicate matters though, this latter faction included a variety of civilian allies in the media with their own nuanced agendas, as well as members of the Independent Socialist Party and the so-called *antipersonalista* section of the Radicals. Thus, the cartoon’s humorous exploration of who exactly was to take credit for the coup, and what the goal of the coup actually was, is by no means a straightforward issue and the complexity of Columba’s image represents an enduring concern for historians of Argentine politics.

Before Uriburu was replaced in 1932, the new government launched what Romero (somewhat charitably) describes as a “hard-line policy toward social movements,” including “the interdiction of ports to dismantle union control” and “the deportation of anarchist or Communist leaders.”⁴³ While the coup itself was a sedate affair, with just a few hundred military officers marching to *la Casa Rosada*, Uriburu’s two years at the helm were punctuated by unambiguous bouts of violence and repression. In fact, as Rock explains, Uriburu *personally* “shot a pair of anarchists convicted on charges of sabotage” and “encouraged the formation of the Legión Cívica Argentina, whose members wore fascist-style uniforms and adopted the fascist salute.”⁴⁴ Uriburu also oversaw the trial by military tribunal of the well-known anarchist Severino Di Giovanni, a migrant from Italy who famously proclaimed “*Evviva l’Anarchia!*” before his execution by firing squad.⁴⁵ Indeed, there is an ironic and blood-stained gap between the gilded rhetoric of Uriburu’s

"Catholic scholasticism" and his "conduct as president."⁴⁶ Despite the confusion over the meaning of Yrigoyen's forced departure, it should therefore be abundantly clear why Pynchon singles out this moment as a "touchstone" for an anarchist like Squalidozzi. In addition, the political and emotional resonance of the coup becomes even more forceful when we consider the fact that Uriburu received notable support from the historian Carlos Ibarguren, "one of the initiators of the intellectual rehabilitation of the nineteenth-century dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas."⁴⁷ In the 1830s, it was Rosas who began the first campaigns of what eventually became known as *la Conquista del Desierto* ("the Conquest of the Desert")—an appalling frontier war against Argentina's indigenous population in the south, principally the Mapuches and Tehuelches, that would later involve thousands of conscripted gauchos (a key plot feature of *Martín Fierro*). "We tried to exterminate our Indians, like you," thinks Squalidozzi to himself while conversing with Slothrop—one of the numerous references to genocide in the novel—before explaining out loud that "Rosas has been dead a century, but his cult flourishes" (264). If Pynchon exhibits a broader interest in tipping points, in the pivots and hinges of history, in wrong turns and missed opportunities, then his description of this cartoon from 1930 is haunted by both the past and the future. It looks back at the energy and violence of Argentina's fledgling postcolonial existence and forward to the decades of electoral fraud and militarism that define the latter half of the Argentine twentieth century.

This is not the end of the story, however, when it comes to building the connections with other areas of the *Gravity's Rainbow*. Significantly, Columba's cartoon features the media mogul Natalio Botana, second in line behind Uriburu. Botana's newspaper *Crítica*, which at one point employed Jorge Luis Borges, was a driving force of Argentine modernity; in 1930 it had a daily circulation of close to 300,000 copies.⁴⁸ The paper also played an important role in the advancement of cartoon satire (it was famous, in fact, for its acerbic portrayals of Argentine political turmoil) and Columba himself provided images for it. While Botana was initially an enthusiastic supporter of the coup (allied to the liberal conservative faction), *Crítica* was promptly closed after publishing graphic reports of the abuses committed by Uriburu's regime and he was imprisoned for a period in 1931.⁴⁹ His words here are sublimely hubristic, declaring "*Es hija de mis rotativas, señor comisario*" ("She is the daughter of my printing press, mister commissioner"). Given the emphasis that *Gravity's Rainbow* places on the magical (and deeply ambivalent) link between word and deed, on the dark wizardry of charisma, on media systems, and on technology's appropriation of divine power, it is perhaps no surprise that Pynchon was so drawn to the cartoon. Botana's statement rings both true and hollow—a case of what Pynchon calls magic operating "in a political way" (356), the fallen magic of a technocratic

language that brings to life the thing it describes—and thus evokes aspects of the novel that might otherwise appear disparate, from the uncanny effects of alphabetization in Central Asia to von Göll's cinematic megalomania.

With this wider relationship between language and political power in mind, we can begin to explore why Pynchon chooses to isolate the words of Leopoldo Lugones. Unfortunately, the details on Lugones in both editions of Weisenburger's invaluable *Companion* are actually very misleading in this respect. While the claim that Lugones "always demonstrated sympathies with Argentina's disenfranchised people" has a grain of truth in it, the statement that he was a "liberal in politics" is wide of the mark by some distance.⁵⁰ At one point a radical atheist and a founding member of the Socialist Party, by 1930 Lugones was in fact a committed *nacionalista*, if not an out-and-out fascist whose vision of Argentine regeneration heralded the arrival of *la Hora de la Espada* ("the Hour of the Sword").⁵¹ A champion of *criollo* supremacy, in both cultural and racial terms, it was Lugones who was invited to produce a revolutionary proclamation for the 1930 uprising.⁵² Moreover, it was Lugones who earlier delivered a renowned series of lectures on the gaucho, collected as *El Payador* (1916), which used *Martín Fierro* as a way of expressing "the spirit and character of the people of the River Plate."⁵³ In arguing that the poem should be considered a national epic, Lugones transformed the grittiness of Hernández's vision into an ideological "bulwark against the waves of immigrants who were flooding the country."⁵⁴ He became, as Federico Finchelstein asserts, "an icon of illiberal politics in Latin America," and he provided the intellectual inspiration for the nationalist/fascistic section of the military.⁵⁵ In addition, his short story collection of 1904, *La Guerra Gaucha* (*The Gaucho War*), would later be turned into one of the most successful (and unambiguously patriotic) films in Argentine history during the early 40s,⁵⁶ which offers another possible link with von Göll's plan to film *Martín Fierro* (and thus the uncomfortable compromises to be made by the anarchists).

There is, however, an intriguing and disturbing extra layer to this, or at least a potential one. Lugones's son—also called Leopoldo but generally known as "Polo"—was to become head of the "Special Section" of the Federal Police after the 1930 coup and was notorious for his sadistic zeal in persecuting leftist dissidents. Within this context, Polo Lugones has the distinction of being credited with introducing the world to the *picana* (or electric cattle prod) as an instrument of torture, usually applied to the genitals.⁵⁷ Given the fact that Columba's cartoon is set in a police station, it is therefore tempting to see two generations of the Lugones family in the one figure, albeit with the benefit of hindsight. Indeed, this interpretation is encouraged by the additional term that Pynchon includes in his translation of Lugones's speech bubble: "*Le voy a contar, en verso, cómo la*

conseguí sin mancha de pecado." In the novel, "*sin mancha de pecado*" ("without the stain of sin") becomes "free from the stain of Original Sin." Not only does this subtly alter the theological implications of the quote (evoking the deep concern with Calvinist predestination that permeates *Gravity's Rainbow*), but the phrase "*mancha de pecado original*" is sometimes used in reference to the genitals and thus offers us a possible allusion to the gruesome activities of Lugones Jr.⁵⁸ Whether this had any bearing on Pynchon's decision to include it, or whether it is simply a case of mistranscription or creative licence, will perhaps always remain speculation (although it is worth remembering that Pynchon places great importance on ancestry and genealogy throughout his fiction and, more specifically, Lugones Jr. killed himself—like father, like son—just two years before the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow*).⁵⁹ We can be relatively confident, though, in surmising that the quote which Pynchon translates/adapts is Columba's own invention. While it does correspond nicely with the solemn portentousness of Lugones's public persona, and while there are numerous references to *pecado* in his poetry and writings, nothing resembling the phrase presents itself as a likely source. Similarly, there is no obvious correlative in the revolutionary proclamation written for Uriburu.

What is ultimately most significant, however, is that Lugones can now be acknowledged as playing a brief but striking role in the novel's engagement with the "poetics" of fascism (most memorably explored via the monstrous Captain Blicero's interest in Rilke). Indeed, the combination of Lugones's authoritarian politics and the "[e]roticism, heavily laden with sadistic or macabre overtones," of his *modernismo* means that he firmly belongs to this grim part of the novel's imaginative landscape.⁶⁰ The later references to a "poignant recital of 'Pavos Reales,'" a collection of lyrical poems, and to a "soft night, smeared full of golden stars, the kind of night back on the pampas that Leopoldo Lugones liked to write about" (383), are therefore powerfully undercut by his earlier appearance in the cartoon. Moreover, the fact that it is Felipe who is identified as reading Lugones—the U-boat's "difficult young poet"—reminds us, as David Cowart remarks on the Gaucho in *V.*, that "totalitarian proclivities" are all too easily disguised by "persuasive rhetoric and captivating panache."⁶¹ The strain on the "solidarity" of the anarchists, it is darkly implied, might be rooted in more serious concerns than stealing each other's girlfriends (383).

Acción Argentina

Beyond these fascist elements, Pynchon's two references to an organization called *Acción Argentina* provide us with another instructive journey into some of the novel's hidden

textures. After displaying the cartoon and acquainting himself with Slothrop, Squalidozzi attempts to explain the decision to flee to Europe, noting that “our last hope was Acción Argentina” (263). Later, as we follow the anarchists to the coast of Northern Germany, Pynchon explains that the “international eccentric” Graciela Imago Portales was once “the urban idiot of B.A., threatening nobody, friends with everybody across the spectrum, from Cipriano Reyes [. . .] to Acción Argentina” (263, 383).⁶² First of all, another small flaw in Weisenburger’s *Companion* can be corrected here, which wrongly describes Acción Argentina as a “militant Catholic organization” (perhaps confusing it with Acción Católica Argentina, a long-standing church advocacy network).⁶³ In fact, Acción Argentina was formed in June 1940 in response to the divisive issue of Argentine neutrality during World War Two. With support for the Allies linked to pro-democratic and anti-government politics, the group was dedicated to suppressing the growth of Nazism in Argentina and resisting the influence of the German embassy. Its members included “Radicals, Socialists,” and “many intellectuals without party affiliation.”⁶⁴ Moreover, bolder elements within Acción Argentina argued directly for the country’s entry into the war on the Allied side. Before it was disbanded in 1943, the organization could boast of almost 300 subsidiaries. It is therefore easy to understand the logic of Pynchon’s references in this light, doubly so given the overt political sympathies of his gaucho-anarchist-submariners. In addition, the imaginative pull of the unrealized alternative history that it evokes—blue and white *banderas* fluttering in Normandy or Berlin—is hard to resist. As is so often the case in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we can be lead into an entirely different universe, a counter-narrative with both destructive and redemptive possibilities, by the most casual allusions and asides. What is more difficult to ascertain, however, is how Pynchon might have come across the group. Even if snippets of information could have been found in a variety of sources, with Acción Argentina sketchily reported on in the mainstream US media (including *Time* magazine), serious scholarship on the organization, and indeed on Argentine anti-fascism more generally, is still very much a developing field. The first book-length study of Acción Argentina was not published until 2005, and the group’s manifesto has only been freely available (as part of an academic collection of anti-fascist documents) since 2007.⁶⁵ While this might partially explain why Pynchon does not elaborate, we are still left with an engaging mystery. Again, we must descend into speculation, but it is nonetheless interesting to note that one of Acción Argentina’s most respectable public figures, the Socialist politician Federico Pinedo, features in Ramón Columba’s cartoon. Similarly, the fact that Pynchon mentions Silvina Ocampo in one of his letters to the Sales provides a possible link to the group.⁶⁶ Ocampo’s sister Victoria, described by Borges as “la mujer más Argentina” (“the quintessential Argentine woman”),⁶⁷ was a committed

member; *Villa Ocampo*, the site of a Bloomsbury-like artistic community, is in Mar del Plata, where the anarchists begin their voyage. Lastly, if the experience of the revolutionary 60s is ever-present in Pynchon's work, then the fact that one Ernesto "Che" Guevara was a member of the group's youth wing in Alta Garcia might conceivably be a factor.⁶⁸

Returning to the subject of cartooning, two images from the newspaper *Alerta!* circa 1940, an official mouthpiece of Acción Argentina, are especially useful when it comes to evaluating the wider significance of the nation's internal divisions (and indeed its transatlantic relationships) for Pynchon's novel. Although it is unlikely that Pynchon would have been able to access such documents, his interest in cartoon satire (and in Argentina's history of authoritarianism and resistance) is substantial enough to justify the detour. Indeed, they dramatize very effectively how the threat of Nazism was intimately bound up with questions of Argentine identity and autonomy during this period and therefore help to provide a kind of archival back story for Pynchon's anarchists.

The first (Fig. 2.), by the artist Tristán, shows a typical *criollo* in rural attire, complete with both knife and guitar—two objects with a special resonance in *Martín Fierro* (a fatal knife fight and a singing duel are key incidents in the narrative). It is, simply put, immediately suggestive of the struggle, freedom and romance of the Argentine pampa. In the bottom left corner, however, is a traditional German beer *stein* emblazoned with a swastika, and the enthusiastic *payador* sports round spectacles and a toothbrush moustache, clearly evoking the appearance of certain senior Nazis.⁶⁹ The satirical caption that accompanies the cartoon is equally unambiguous: "*Nosotros los criollos, fidalitá—de pura cepa,—keremos mandar solos, fidalita—en esta tierra!*" ("We authentic Criollos—of pure stock—we want to rule alone on this earth!"). If the co-optation of the traditions and folklore of the pampa is a major component of *Gravity's Rainbow* and not merely a screwball sideline—part of an ongoing series of debates about the hazardous intersections between fantasy, creativity and geo-political domination—then lingering over an image like this helps us to trace out the continuities that bind together the various strands of Pynchon's Argentine material, as well as illuminating both the playfulness and seriousness which defines it.

The second image (Fig. 3.), by Carybé, indicts a different level of Argentine society in a similarly bombastic way, depicting a lavish banquet attended by military and political figures (precisely the kind of shadowy gathering of forces that came together for Uriburu's *coup d'état*). The swastika light-fittings and goose-stepping servants here are impossible to misinterpret, and the caption reads "*Plato Unico: Traicion a la Patria*" ("Main Course: Betrayal of the Homeland"). While such antifascist propaganda might be rather crudely designed, a more distinguished practitioner of the art such as Columba



Fig. 2. *Alerta!* 22 Oct 1940. Reproduced courtesy of el CeDInCI.



Fig. 3. *Alerta!* 12 Nov 1940. Reproduced courtesy of el CeDInCI.

was a passionate advocate of the unique "*sentido crítico*" ("critical feeling") of the cartoon image—"agudo o ingenuo, divertido o amargo" ("deep or naïve, bitter or sweet"), waxing lyrical about "*la profilaxis del espíritu*" ("the prophylaxis of the spirit") that defines the best cartooning and "*su arriesgado martirologio bajo las dictaduras*" ("its risky martyrdom under dictatorships").⁷⁰ These are qualities, I would suggest, that Pynchon also sees in cartoons—a very specific synthesis of anarchic experimentation and concentrated formal discipline—and they are qualities which are stretched, tested and remodeled in his exploration of Argentina culture.

In addition, these images are worth dwelling on because they provide such a vivid example of how the destiny of "Latin" Argentina has been shaped by its relations with Germany, a point that is quietly but sharply communicated in the novel. We are told, for example, that Graciela has prior knowledge of von Göll when the film version of *Martín Fierro* is first discussed: "there are lines of liaison, sinister connections of blood and of wintering at Punta del Este, through Anilinas Alemanas, the IG branch in Buenos Aires"—a direct reference, of course, to IG Farben, the industrial cartel and lynchpin of the German war effort that Pynchon draws our attention to so frequently (387). The talk of "sinister connections" also reminds us of the fact that Argentina was to become a new home for so many of the Third Reich's most notorious figures, including Adolph Eichmann and Joseph Mengele, with the former captured by Israeli agents in 1960 and his trial in Jerusalem so famously documented by Hannah Arendt.⁷¹ Pynchon's ruminations on Borges while asking Faith Sale for more information on the writer can almost certainly be read in this context: "The Grove flyleaf [of *Ficciones*] says B. was influenced by German expressionism. I hope not. Argentina being enough of a German colony already."⁷² From the specificity of the details in *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, it also appears that Pynchon developed a more than casual awareness of how the ground was prepared for the Nazi exodus by a clandestine strengthening of Argentine-German relations that predates the outbreak of war. Anilinas Alemanas, the IG Farben subsidiary, was established as far back as 1926,⁷³ and there was contact between various Argentine officials and the Nazi secret service in the 1930s. A 1942 meeting between von Ribbentrop and Juan Carlos Goyeneche, an envoy of the publicly neutral Castillo government, explored post-war trade agreements and sought German support for Argentina's claim on the Malvinas/Falkland Islands.⁷⁴ This would ultimately culminate in the extraordinary conspiratorial network overseen by Juan Péron that was designed to secure a safe haven for the disgraced fascist elite (perversely coinciding with the admission of thousands of European Jews). Indeed, this plot was the equal of anything that Pynchon himself might cook up—not simply "a tight organization with only nostalgic Nazis for members," as Uki Goñi explains, but "layered

rings" of numerous factions that included the Vatican, Allied intelligence agencies, the Croatian Ustaša and the SS.⁷⁵ We do not need fantastical images of Hitler sipping Malbec on some remote *estancia* to spice up the tale. As historian Uki Goñi has explained, Péron's "monolithic sense of military honour" was outraged by the spectacle of Nuremburg and while exiled in Spain he would eventually recount some of his personal motives for facilitating the rescue of war criminals.⁷⁶ In October 1973, the year *Gravity's Rainbow* was published, he returned to begin a new presidency before dying ten months later. Although Pynchon would not have been privy to all of the intricacies at stake here, with the full declassification of Argentina's "Nazi files" not coming until 1992 under Carlos Menem,⁷⁷ the novel alludes to these nefarious dealings with a finely calibrated sense of economy, sensitive as ever to the tentacular operations of vested interests. The references to corporate deals, "wintering in Punta del Este" (actually a Uruguayan coastal resort popular with wealthy Argentines) and Péronist agents in Zürich, demonstrate an exceptional kind of what Columba calls "*sentido crítico*"—gradually linking up to produce a networked portrait of national and transnational power relations, simultaneously nuanced and accusatory. With the presence of Acción Argentina, he also reminds us of the nobility, necessity and *difficulty* of resistance—positing Argentina's history in terms of a complex dialectic between force and counterforce.

Jorge Luis Borges pensado en algo que no alcanza a ser poema . . .

At this point in the analysis, the figure who has been present on the sidelines throughout can now move to the centre of attention—the great constructor of labyrinths, Jorge Luis Borges. On one level, discussing the relationship between Pynchon and Borges might appear to be covering old ground. Almost every major book on the former has acknowledged the latter in some way, from path-finding work by Tony Tanner⁷⁸ to recent studies by the likes of Sascha Pöhlmann.⁷⁹ There are also a number of stand-alone pieces on the subject. Deborah Castillo, for example, offers a compelling reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* as a sort of dialogue with Borges, arguing that both writers are "masters" of "a desperate comedy of inaccessibility," which privileges "intensely imagined symbols: in Borges, the dreams, labyrinths, mirrors, and tigers so familiar to his readers. Pynchon shares the dreams and the labyrinths, but for him, modern media substitutes for the Borgesian mirrors, and technological marvels are his tigers."⁸⁰ Indeed, these assertions now have historical/biographical substance given the fact that the letters at the Harry Ransom Center allow us to fix the acceleration of Pynchon's "Borges kick" in 1963. It is during this stint in Mexico that Pynchon read Borges in Spanish for the first time, having previously encountered

translations of his work in the anthology *New World Writing* and in an unnamed collection of short stories received “many Xmases back” from his sister: “not that my Spanish is any good, but I figure it’s only common courtesy to read somebody in the original if it can be done without too much trouble.”⁸¹ Moreover, Pynchon’s “genuflections”⁸² to the Argentine writer in *Gravity’s Rainbow* have been lucidly discussed—including an important essay by Carole Holdsworth, which rigorously tracks the way in which elements of Borges’s “El fin,” a short work directly inspired by Hernández, are as important as the original *Martín Fierro* story.⁸³ My emphasis, however, is not so much on how Pynchon deploys and adapts certain Borgesian motifs, which have been more than adequately covered. Nor do I wish to invoke some sort of Bloomian *agon* or rehash the kind of deconstructive game that might typically unfold around questions of translation, inheritance, and influence (with Borges himself providing some of the finest examples of this). Rather, my aims here are both limited and pointed: firstly, to briefly revisit a very particular enigma in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and, secondly, to explore how Borges’s perverse sense of nationhood is crucial to Pynchon’s immersion in Argentine cultural politics and history.

In Edwin Williamson’s biography of Borges, a great deal of attention is lavished on Borges’s relationship with the poet Norah Lange in the 1920s. She is described, in fact, as “his Apollinairean muse.”⁸⁴ According to Williamson, it is Lange who provides the inspiration for Borges’s cryptic but “ultraconfessional view of literary communication.”⁸⁵ She is cast as a “unifying Aleph” who plays a key role in one of Borges’s most intense preoccupations, symbolically reconciling “the foreign and criollo sides of his family heritage.”⁸⁶ Lange, however, was to become wracked with indecision due to her tempestuous romantic ties to Oliverio Girondo, and abruptly broke off her informal engagement to Borges. To add insult to injury, Lange published a “gratuitous” review of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in April 1927 entitled “*Jorge Luis Borges pensado en algo que no alcanza a ser poema*” (“Thinking of Jorge Luis Borges in something that does not quite manage to be a poem”). Her complaint “was that the Buenos Aires evoked in Borges’s poems was too placid—it was always dressed in its Sunday best.”⁸⁷ The abstruse title of Lange’s review, I would argue, has a special relevance to *Gravity’s Rainbow* (if not a direct influence) as Pynchon offers us a very literal version of what it means to think of Jorge Luis Borges “*en algo que no alcanza a ser poema*.” Graciela, the aforementioned “urban idiot of B.A.,” is not only associated with Cipriano Reyes and Acción Argentina. Indeed, we are also told that she was once “a particular favourite of the literati. Borges is said to have dedicated a poem to her (‘El laberinto de tu incertidumbre / Me trama con la disquietante luna . . .’)” (263). Weisenburger provides an excellent gloss on this eye-catching detail:

The quotation does not appear in the *Obras Poéticas* (Poetical Works) of Jorge Luis Borges, nor does it crop up in the course of his fictional work. It is neatly consistent with the rhythms and motifs of Borges's poems, and if the lines are not his then Pynchon has worked up a decent imitation—a neat trick, given the way Borges's fictions reinvent literary history. The lines translate: "The labyrinth of your uncertainty / Detains me with the anxious moon."⁸⁸

It is difficult to challenge this scrupulous assessment of the puzzle. As Weisenburger suggests, Pynchon applies Borges's well-practiced habit of blurring the lines between fact and fiction to Borges himself. In offering us "something that does not quite manage to be a poem," Pynchon has crafted a looping, intricate, and humorous tribute. We can perhaps, however, add an additional dimension to Weisenburger's exacting research, beyond the prospective link to the title of Lange's review. Although nothing directly resembling these lines can be found in Borges's *Spanish* writings, perhaps the handful of material he produced in English can provide us with some clues. Borges's "Two English Poems" were written in 1934 and, as Jaime Alazraki explains, these short pieces record some of "the most significant experiences and events of the poet's personal life"—including "desperate sunsets, lean streets, ragged suburbs, [. . .] his grandfather killed on the frontier of Buenos Aires, [. . .] books, explanations, theories." Indeed, the two poems can be read "as a microcosm of his entire poetic work."⁸⁹ Moreover, the poems are among the few that with come with a dedication—initially to a mysterious I. G. (meaningful initials for Pynchon, of course) and later to one Beatriz Bibiloni Webster de Bullrich.⁹⁰ In the early part of poem II, Borges writes of "the bitterness of a man who has looked / long and long at the lonely moon" and it concludes as follows: "I am trying to bribe you / with uncertainty, with danger, with defeat." It is therefore a possibility that Pynchon's tribute has an extra layer of trickery to it—using Borges's native language, in the 11-syllable lines of a Spanish sonnet, to allude to the "lonely moon" and "uncertainty" that are evoked in English. Another factor to consider is the fact that *disquietante* is actually a linguistic error—*inquietante* is the correct Spanish term that Weisenburger implicitly translates—and thus might potentially be read as a kind of deliberate mistake that points to the constructedness of the faux quotation.

Before this textual enigma becomes all-consuming, however, I should reaffirm that my real focus here is on the wider significance of Borges in *Gravity's Rainbow*—or, more specifically, on the significance Borges as an *Argentine* writer. Indeed, it is Borges who provides Pynchon with the "basic dichotomy" between "the labyrinth and the plain" that looms throughout the Argentine sections of the novel—first identified in

the letters to the Sales, and fine-tuned for Squalidozzi's musings on national character. There is something about the "flatness" of the landscape, Pynchon writes to Kirk and Faith, which must "drive sensitive Argentine writers somewhat out of their gourd, at least to the extent that they start filling their yarns with all manner of rabbit warrens and labyrinths."⁹¹ Thus mirroring a process that we often see in Borges's own work, literary criticism becomes literary fiction and vice versa. It is Borges who provides the inspiration for various allusions and riddles in the novel, as we have seen.⁹² It is Borges, in his youth, who was a passionate supporter of Hipólito Yrigoyen, actively campaigning for his re-election as part of *el Comité de Jóvenes Intelectuales* ("the Committee of Young Intellectuals") before Uriburu changed the political landscape.⁹³ It is Borges who once contributed, like Ramón Columba, to Natalio Botana's *Crítica* newspaper. It is Borges who vigorously contested the nationalist reading of *Martín Fierro* propagated by Leopoldo Lugones. As Williamson explains, in everything Borges would write about the poem, and in his own fiction about gauchos, "there would run an implicit argument against Lugones's mystification"—championing the work while at the same time insisting that it could not be considered an epic. The poem's central figure, after all, is "a murderer and a deserter, and as such he had more of the contradictory qualities of a character in a novel than of an epic hero."⁹⁴ It is Borges who was famously relieved of his post at the Miguel Cané Library and offered the derisory position of "chicken inspector" after criticising Péron.⁹⁵ As Pynchon was fine-tuning his knowledge as an "Argentinophile" in the sixties and early seventies, Borges was at the height of his fame—touring the United States on numerous occasions to deliver lectures and receive awards. If Norah Lange was once Borges's personal "aleph," then Borges serves a similar purpose here in terms of marshalling the diverse elements of Pynchon's fascination with Argentina.

Looking back at this web of connections, it is worth noting that I earlier borrowed a term from Edward Mendelson in describing *Gravity's Rainbow* as a radically "impure" work of fiction.⁹⁶ Significantly, Mendelson uses this impurity to make a clear distinction between Pynchon's novel and the writings of Borges that it alludes to. Although profoundly engaged with "the nature and consequences of origins," he asserts, *Gravity's Rainbow* is "passionately concerned with the way we live now."⁹⁷ While I would never dispute the enduring resonance of this latter claim (nor the elementary point that they are simply very different writers), the implication that Borges's fictions are somehow unworldly or escapist, untouched by national and street-level concerns, is actually rather problematic—doubly so given the fact that this version of Borges stands in such stark contrast to Pynchon's own interpretation of his work. *Gravity's Rainbow* is not only impressed or influenced by Borges—it reinterprets him. It demonstrates how

the mirrors, tigers, and labyrinths that populate Borges's *ficciones* are inextricably linked to the ugly realities of land acquisition, to debates over the nature of governance, to the extermination of Indians, to urbanism, to forms of political charisma and social control, to the responsibilities of the artist and to the complex ways in which literary creativity has contributed to the Argentine national imaginary. Borges's abstractions are therefore universal in one sense but highly particularized in another. As Pynchon reflects on his experience of living in Mexico to the Sales, he writes that being "in Latin America has got me, I think, keyed up over the idea of young countries, countries (tribes, linguistic groups, peoples, whatever) in the process of becoming; of finding out how much they might really be capable of, or at least testing the limits of possibility."⁹⁸ And it is precisely this "process of becoming," I would suggest, distinct from more obvious forms of nativism and nationalism, that Pynchon identifies in Borges. His fictions incessantly reach out across national boundaries but, at the same time, we are always brought back down to earth—to the labyrinth and the plain, to the tensions and contradictions that underpin what it might mean to be Argentine. Despite Borges's reputation as a remote, patrician figure—more concerned with ancient Babylon, Shakespeare, or H. G. Wells than what was unfolding outside his door—there is compelling evidence to the contrary. His works, as Daniel Balderston has argued for many years, are "intimately marked by the experience of twentieth-century Argentine history and politics."⁹⁹ What is therefore remarkable about Pynchon's reading of Borges is the fact that he insists on this at the very moment of Borges's "internationalization." In fact, Borges's imaginative perversity, his willingness to demonstrate the arbitrariness of national boundaries—mischievously describing himself as "an old anarchist" in later life—while simultaneously helping to shape and define them, might just be the most lasting quality of his writing. As Carlos Fuentes asks: *¿Puede haber algo más argentino que esa necesidad de llenar verbalmente los vacíos, de acudir a todas las bibliotecas del mundo para llenar el libro en blanco de la Argentina?* ("Could there be anything more Argentine than this necessity to verbally fill these empty spaces, to take recourse in all the world's libraries to fill the blank book of Argentina?")¹⁰⁰ And in this sense, there is something very Argentine about *Gravity's Rainbow* too.

"Ya has corrido mundo y te has hecho hombre, mejor que hombre gaucho."¹⁰¹

If we began with the brief appearance of The Gaucho in *V.*, then the subject of gauchos (another connective thread) provides an apt way of bringing this investigation to a close. In attempting to articulate a wider sense of compositional and thematic order in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Kathryn Hume draws a useful analogy with the other displaced peoples that

feature in the novel, such as the Kirghiz tribes and the Hereros. They are “the broken and distorted remnants of an alternative to the Western style of living. Within memory, their lives were ahistorical, cyclical, and, in some senses, free. But these people are more reminders of lost options than viable choices now.”¹⁰² We might refine this, however, by introducing a number of important qualifications—not least by acknowledging that in the foundational works of the *gauchesco* genre, as Amy Kaminsky explains, the “tragically romantic figure” of the gaucho is “*always already* in the process of extinction.”¹⁰³ Or in other words, the disappearance of the gaucho has played an active role in defining him—and it is this fragile, unstable quality which informs the explicitly politicized valorization of the gaucho’s way of life by the anarchists. Bioy Casares, for example, wryly describes how generations of witnesses have claimed that the gaucho “only existed in the past, preferably seventy years before each of these affirmations.”¹⁰⁴ Pynchon, it should also be noted, creates an ironic distance from this gaucho mania—while in another sense remaining true to the “process of extinction” that shapes the *gauchesque* mode—lest we be tempted into over-identifying with romantic images of “unscribbled serenity” (264). “For this crew,” he writes, “nostalgia is like seasickness: only the hope of dying from it is keeping them alive.” The figure of El Ñato is especially significant in this respect, preposterously adopting “19th-century slang” and offering dubious snippets of chauvinistic wisdom: “‘Let women do their thinking, their analyzing. A man must always go forward, looking Life directly in the face’” (383–384). Indeed, what happens to women in *gauchesco* stories is “worse than simple absence”—with female characters frequently subject to kidnapping and rape.¹⁰⁵ In addition, Pynchon crucially reminds us that Hernández wrote a sequel to his poem, *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879), which appears to have been conveniently excised from the memories of the anarchists. The gaucho, we are told, “sells out: assimilates back into Christian society, gives up his freedom for the kind of constitutional *Gesellschaft* being pushed those days by Buenos Aires. A very moral ending, but completely opposite to the first” (387). It is this question of “selling out” that is so rapidly bypassed in agreeing to collaborate with von Göll, with the whole group “infected” by his madness. Only Graciela, having previously dismissed El Ñato as “‘a sweaty horse’” and Felipe as “‘a Gaucho Marx’” (384, 386), exhibits any kind of self-consciousness about the decision: “Will the soul of the Gaucho survive the mechanics of putting him into light and sound? Or will someone ultimately come by, von Göll or another, to make a Part II, and dismantle the dream?” (388)

Even with these exaggerations, ironies and compromises, Pynchon joins an eclectic list of non-Argentines who have written on the gaucho in various forms (fiction,

anthropology, travel writing, and so on), including *gringo* visitors such as Charles Darwin and Cunninghame Graham¹⁰⁶ and, more recently, writers from elsewhere in Latin America such as Roberto Bolaño.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, by both underlining and undermining the potency of the gaucho ideal, he contributes to the substantial critical tradition that has evolved in relation to it, which now stretches from the seminal interventions by Lugones and Borges to Derridean and feminist readings by Josephina Ludmer, whose influential study *El Género Gauchesco* is now a classic of its kind.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps most interestingly, however, his exploration of putting the gaucho “into light and sound” is also part of a wider context: a blockbuster film version of *Martín Fierro* was actually released in 1968, directed by Leopoldo Torre Nilsson (a fact which has been weirdly ignored by Pynchon scholars). Before “selling out,” as it were, with this uncontroversial take on Argentina’s national epic, Nilsson’s earlier work included a number of “radical formal experiments” and, as Timothy Barnard explains, he earned critical acclaim for his baroque, black-and-white cinematography “which made use of extreme shadows, high contrast, and spot lighting that often revealed only part of an actor’s face.”¹⁰⁹ This suggests a possible link with von Göll’s plan to use “Emulsion J”—a special film stock which renders the human skin transparent—to enhance the dissolves and contrasts he envisages for the singing duel between “the white gaucho and the dark El Moreno” (387). More broadly, the opening credits of Nilsson’s movie are not so different from the proleptic scenes that Pynchon describes as Felipe works on a treatment: “An enormous flatness. Camera angle is kept low. People coming in . . .” (386). Nilsson’s film also starred one of the great divas of Argentine cinema, named—believe it or not—Graciela Borges (Fig. 4).¹¹⁰ And if these uncanny associations and overlaps were not enough, a version of *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro*—as if brought to life by what is mooted in the novel—was released only a year after *Gravity’s Rainbow* was published, with the much-loved folk singer Horacio Guarany in the lead role.¹¹¹

Finishing with the malleable mythologies of the gaucho tradition therefore provides a neat way of summing up Pynchon’s fascination with Argentina—with its dirty and revelatory secrets, its refined achievements and pulp excesses, its history of violence, its singularity and multiplicity. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, our last glimpse of the anarchists is in “the German pampas” of Lüneburg Heath (612). The preparations for von Göll’s movie are in full swing:

The buildings are real, not a false front in sight. The boliche is stocked with real liquor, the pulpería with real food. The sheep, cattle, horses, and corrals are real. The huts are weatherproof and are being slept in. When von Göll leaves—if he ever comes—nothing



Fig. 4. Graciela Borges and Alfredo Alcón in *Martín Fierro* (1968).

will be struck. Any extras who want to stay are welcome. Many of them only want to rest up awhile for more DP trains, more fantasies of what home was like before the destruction, and some dream of getting somewhere. They'll move on. But will others come? And what will the military government think of a community like this in the middle of their garrison state? (613)

There are many uncertainties here. On the one hand, it appears that the unlikely "anarchist experiment" is gathering genuine substance and momentum (613). The *boliche* and the *pulpería*¹¹² are *real*, not just part of a set; they are the foundations of an alternative reality, of both a new beginning and a return home. The "extras" who choose to stay have the option of joining the main cast. As *Martín Fierro* himself claims, "*acuí no hay imitación, / ésta es pura realidad*" ("here there is no imitation, / only pure reality").¹¹³ On the other, the questions and qualifications do not cease. What *will* happen if "Der Springer" ever shows up? And can all this truly survive unscathed if he does? A utopian opening is offered to us—just as Argentina *per se* has presented itself to so many displaced peoples,

seekers of freedom and sanctuary from across the spectrum. But the threat of selling out, of von Göll's "corporate octopus" (611), of the Faustian deals struck by desperate individuals and communities, looms behind every regenerative possibility. The presence of a "military government" also sounds depressingly familiar in the context of Argentine history, suggesting that the old maxim of "first as tragedy, then as farce" still holds good. Just prior to this, Graciela, her "dark hair parted in the middle and drawn back from her forehead" (and thus notably similar to her namesake in Nilsson's film), is struck by another moment of self-consciousness and vulnerability. If everything falls apart, we are informed, she is unsure what strength she can muster: "Often at night she'll break through a fine membrane of alcohol and optimism to see really how much she needs the others, how little use, unsupported, she could ever be" (613). There is nowhere else to go; there is nothing for it but to play the odds. We therefore have issues here that are dramatized throughout the novel and indeed across Pynchon's entire body of work: the slippages between representation and reality (never simply a playful and/or neutral business); the murky distinction between chance and fate; the politics of knowledge and ignorance; the politics of complicity, interdependence, sacrifice and hope. At the same time, however, we can only arrive at the general concerns that this moment represents because of the absolute rigor and *specificity* of Pynchon's immersion in Argentine culture. The whole scene is marked and defined by the Borgesian perversity which constitutes the boundaries of nationhood—incessantly reinforced, incessantly breached. "*Pero qué,*" as Squalidozzi tells Slothrop, "*no sós argentino.*"

Acknowledgements

Quotations from Pynchon's letters to the Sales are reproduced with the permission of the Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas at Austin. The author would like to thank James Cane-Carrasco (for his amazing pointers on archival sleuthing in Buenos Aires), Karen Peña (for her guidance on Borges), and the staff at El CeDInCI. Steven Weisenburger, John Krafft, and David Cowart were also immensely generous in passing on their advice and support. Most of all, my eternal gratitude goes out to the inspirational Daniela Vazquez Kalf, without whom this article would not have been possible and who has kindly provided all translations from Spanish, unless otherwise stated.

Notes

1. Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973; London and New York: Vintage, 1995), 264. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

2. Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (1963; London and New York: Vintage, 1995), 176. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
3. See, for example, H. Micheal Tarver and Julia C. Frederick, *The History of Venezuela* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 53–55 and Richard W. Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 35–39.
4. Tango soundtracks the action during various episodes in the novel and is also used metaphorically: “the same unsyncopated tango they’d always danced” (96); “Accordion, fiddle and guitar were playing a tango full of minor chords and an eerie flatting of certain notes” (238); “the accordion began a slow sad tango” (279); “A sad tango on the last night of the old world” (317); “Giving tango lessons in Rotterdam” (388); “Behind them the small orchestra began to play a tango” (398); “The tango still played” (400); “It was a tango with cross-rhythms” (404); “I am the ragtime and the tango” (454).
5. As Slatta explains, gauchos “roamed the broad plains of Río de la Plata through what is today Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.” It is Argentina, however, with which the figure of the gaucho will forever be most closely associated—where the gaucho has been marked by a historically contingent (and often politically expedient) “mixture of admiration and vituperation.” See *Cowboys*, 31. More broadly, it is Argentina that has done more than any other Latin America country to incorporate the gaucho into its arts, ideologies and myths.
6. See the detailed entry on “Voseo” in the online *Diccionario Panhispánico De Dudas*, part of the Real Academia Española: <http://buscon.rae.es/dpdI/SrvltGUIBusDPD?lema=voseo>
7. Thomas Pynchon, letter to Faith and Kirkpatrick Sale, June 29, 1963.
8. For a brief but precise summary of how critics have interpreted the Gaucho see J. Jerry Grant, *A Companion to V.* (Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2000), 89.
9. Cited in Grant, *ibid.*
10. There are a number of important studies of anarchism in Pynchon, stretching from contemporary scholarship on *Against the Day* to some of the earliest collections of critical writing on the author. See, for example, Seán Molloy, “Escaping the Politics of the Irredeemable Earth—Anarchy and Transcendence in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon,” *Theory & Event*, 13, no. 3 (2010), n.p.; Graham Benton “The Network of All Plots May Yet Carry Him to Freedom: Thomas Pynchon and the Political Philosophy of Anarchism,” *Oklahoma City University Law Review*, 24, no. 3 (1999), 535–556, and “Riding the Interface: An Anarchist Reading of *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” *Pynchon Notes*, 42–43 (1998), 152–166; George Levine, “Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon’s Fiction,” in *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Chelsea House, 1986), 57–76; Robert Sklar, “An Anarchist Miracle: The Novels of Thomas Pynchon,” in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 87–96.
11. See Ronald C. Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina: 1931–1947* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press), 358–359.
12. Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *X-Ray of the Pampa*, trans. Alain Swietlicki (1933; Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971), 6–7.

13. Richard W. Slatta, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993), 180.
14. See Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 12.
15. A minor point about factual accuracy: Steven Weisenburger's claim that Pynchon's use of the term *maté* is a "slight misreading" does not quite stand up. While it is true to say that the dried leaf used to make Argentina's national beverage is referred to as *yerba*, the drink itself is indeed called *maté*, after the gourd which is traditionally used in its preparation and consumption. See Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel* (Athens and London: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1988), 188.
16. "Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance?" See Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966; London and New York: Vintage, 1996), 131. Pynchon's first reference to tango, however, can actually be found in the short story "Entropy" (1960), where Callisto reflects on Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*. See *Slow Learner* (1984; London and New York: Vintage, 1995), 93. He returns to the tango in more recent work, most notably with a "melancholy but catchy" number about vegetarianism: "Outcast Argentine, / Never could've gone 'O- / le!" for that cuisine . . . / Gauchos curse your name, / Still you haunt my brain- / Somehow I'll carry on, oh . . . / Vegetaria-no!" See *Against the Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), 1082.
17. See John Shepherd and Dave Laing, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, Volumes 3–7 (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 188.
18. *Martín Fierro* is in many respects a poetic protest against the modernizing presidency of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who was himself the author of one of Argentina's most influential texts, *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845; 1851). Sarmiento used the "barbaric" nature of his title character, the gaucho Facundo, to promote his vision of a reborn Argentina via public education, vigorous policing, and immigration from Europe. *Martín Fierro* and *Facundo* therefore "represent a division that would become ingrained in the Argentine psyche. *Facundo* expressed the desire of the Argentines to build a modern liberal nation, while *Martín Fierro* crystallized an ambivalence about modernity, for even though the march of progress appeared to be unstoppable, there lingered a fear that the country might lose its soul to the devil of new ideas and foreign commerce." See Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (New York: Viking, 2004), 8.
19. It is interesting to note here how Squalidozzi's image of "the anarchic oneness of pampas and sky" is located "[b]eneath the city streets." An echo, perhaps, of the well-known Situationist graffiti slogan from Paris, 1968 that Pynchon uses many years later as the epigraph to his most recent novel: "Under the paving-stones, the beach!" (or "*Sous les pavés, la plage!*" in the original French). See Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (London: Jonathan Cape: 2009).
20. See Javaid Qazi, "Pynchon in Central Asia: The Use of Sources and Resources," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 34–4 (1980): 229–242.
21. Pynchon's gaucho anarchists are briefly referenced and/or discussed in relation to the novel's broader engagement with film by a large number of critics. Select examples include Joseph Dewey,

In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper in the American Novel of the Nuclear Age (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Research Foundation, 1990), 165; N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), 182–184; David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1980), 55.

22. Ernesto Livon-Grosman, "The Global Appropriation of Jorge Luis Borges: Reconfiguring the Scattered Pieces," in *Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) as Writer and Social Critic*, ed. Gregory J. Racz (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 25–46, at 25.
23. Thomas Pynchon, Letter to Faith and Kirkpatrick Sale, June 2 1963.
24. Thomas Pynchon, Letter to Faith and Kirkpatrick Sale, March 27 1964.
25. Pynchon, June 29, 1963.
26. See http://themodernword.com/pynchon/Pynchon_kenosha_kid.html
27. I take this term from Edward Mendelson, "Pynchon's Gravity," in Bloom, 10–17, at 16.
28. Sascha Pöhlmann, *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), 67.
29. José Hernández, *Martín Fierro*, Bilingual Edition (1872; [rpt.] Buenos Aires: Ediciones LEA, 2009), 123.
30. See Jorge Luis Borges, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923; [rpt.] Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 2005), 39. While "Arrabal" is a relatively common Latin surname, it is also a *lunfardo* term—originally a kind underworld dialect which was popularized by its use in tango lyrics—that loosely translates as "slum." More specifically, it refers to a kind of shady neighborhood where tango would be danced. See Victor A. Levant, *A Pickpocket's History of Argentine Tango* (North Charleston, SC: Createspace, 2010), 125.
31. The fact that *Lot 49* is set in 1964 is first directly posited, to the best of my knowledge, by David Cowart. See "Pynchon and the Sixties," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 41, no. 1 (1999), 3–13, at 9.
32. The link between these two episodes is made all the more compelling when we consider Gene H. Bell-Villada's reading of *The Crying of Lot 49*. According to Bell-Villada, Arrabal's oft-quoted remark about the meaning of an anarchist miracle ("You know what a miracle is. Not what Bakunin said. But another world's intrusion into this one") is directly lifted/adapted from "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." See Bell-Villada, *Borges and his Fiction: A Guide to his Mind and Art* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1999), 280.
33. See, for example, H. Brenton Stevens, "Look! Up in the Sky! It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's . . . Rocket-man!: Pynchon's Comic Book Mythology in *Gravity's Rainbow*," *Studies in Popular Culture*, 19, no. 3 (1997).
34. Information from the introductory material in Ramón Columba's *Qué es la Caricatura* (Buenos Aires: Dunkin, 2007), 4.
35. Available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrVSxIhfeKk>
36. Note that Pynchon writes of "never having been within a couple thousand miles of the place" in the letter dated June 29. That being said, however, the letter does mention vague but ambitious

travel plans, including a possible visit to the Sales in Accra, Ghana (where Kirkpatrick took an academic post), as well as to Italy and Yugoslavia: "all subject to a categorical D.V." As to whether these plans were ever realized, we can only speculate.

37. This consensus is bolstered by the recent remark made by Pynchon's friend Phyllis Gebauer, after donating her collection of signed first editions to the UCLA Extension Writers Program: "When Tom lived in L.A. he did a lot of research at the UCLA research library." See Carolyn Kellogg, "When Thomas Pynchon is just Tom: A remarkable collection debuts," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 2011. Unfortunately, the precise acquisition dates for Dell' Acqua's anthology are unavailable from both the NYPL and UCLA (a downside of the digital recataloguing process).
38. In Dell' Acqua's collection, the figures queuing up to claim the infant revolution are listed as follows, moving from left to right: Ricardo Hermelo (holding the baby), Uriburu, Natalio Botana, Colonel Francisco Reynolds, Antonio de Tomaso, Antonio Santamarina, Leopoldo Lugones, Federico Cantoni, Enrique E. Pérez, Eszequiel Paz, General Agustín Justo, Federico Pinedo, and Leopoldo Melo. However, there are only *eleven* clearly defined faces on show in the queue, excluding the anonymous policeman at the doorway. This would suggest that the last figure in Dell' Acqua's list, Leopoldo Melo, is identifiable via his speech bubble alone. Working from this logic, the text in the cartoon can be broken down like so: Hermelo (Police Commissioner): "It was found in the street. Ladies, let's see who it belongs to." Botana (editor of *Crítica*): "She is the daughter of my printing press, mister commissioner." Reynolds (director of the Military College in Buenos Aires): "My dear daughter born in my school!" De Tomaso (leader of the PSI, or Independent Socialist Party): "I sacrificed myself for her!" Lugones: "Now I'm going to tell you, in verse, how I conceived her without the stain of sin." Melo (founder of the *antipersonalista* faction of the Radical Party): "After fourteen years." Melo is the most likely candidate as he was elected to the Argentine senate in 1916, which would explain the content of the speech bubble. Policeman: "Line up ladies, there's plenty for all of you if you don't snatch." See Amadeo Dell' Acqua, *La Caricatura Política Argentina* (Editorial Universitaria: Buenos Aires, 1960), 131.
39. See David Rock, *Argentina: 1516–1987, from Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 215.
40. Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. James P. Brennan (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica Argentina, 2002), 27.
41. See Rock, *Argentina*, 214.
42. Romero, 62.
43. *Ibid.*, 60.
44. David Rock, "Argentina, 1930–1946," in *Argentina Since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 173–242, at 178.
45. See Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), 60.
46. Rock, "Argentina, 1930–1946," 178.
47. Romero, 60.

48. See Beatriz Sarlo Sabajanes, *La Imaginación Técnica: Sueños Modernos de la Cultura Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1992), 68.
49. See Álvaro Abós, *El Tábano: Vida, Pasión y Muerte de Natalio Botana* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001), 101.
50. Weisenburger, 137.
51. This phrase dates from a lecture of 1924 given in Ayahuco, Peru. See Finchelstein, 67.
52. A term with a complex history across Latin America, which originates from the colonial caste system, but in this context refers to the sector of the population who were born in Argentina and of “pure” Spanish descent. There is thus a rather grim irony in the fact that gauchos, many of whom were *mestizos*, and had been denigrated/persecuted as such in the past, were used at this point as a way of upholding ideological conceptions of racial purity.
53. At the Teatro Odeón in Buenos Aires, May 1913. See Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 277.
54. Williamson, 14.
55. Finchelstein, 68. My italics.
56. *La Guerra Gaucha* (dir. Lucas Demare, 1942). Set during Argentina’s war of independence, the film’s nationalistic sentiments can be read against the backdrop of the 1943 military uprising that unseated president Ramón Castillo. See Paula Félix-Didier and Andrés Levinson, “The Building of a Nation: *La Guerra Gaucha* as Historical Melodrama,” in *Latin American Melodrama: Passion, Pathos, and Entertainment*, ed. Darlene Joy Sadlier (Champaign, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2009), 50–53.
57. The *picana* remains the foremost emblem of torture in Argentina. After *Crítica* was reopened, and as reports of torture began to surface, the newspaper presented Lugones Jr. as “the ultimate personification of sadistic behaviour and criminality” and “a symbol for Uriburu and his regime.” See Finchelstein, 74.
58. A rather scandalous example of this—in relation to the sainted Eva Perón—can be found in Tomás Eloy Martínez, *La Novela de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Legasa, 1987), 126.
59. Lugones Sr. took a fatal dose of cyanide in 1938 at El Tropezón, a hotel in the delta town of Tigre. See, for example, Jason Wilson, *Buenos Aires: A Cultural and Literary History* (Oxford: Signal Books, 1999), 168.
60. See Gwen Kirkpatrick, *The Dissonant Legacy of Modernismo: Lugones, Herrera y Reissig, and the Voices of Modern Spanish American Poetry* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 95.
61. Cowart, *Allusion*, 16.
62. Reyes was a prominent union leader who was associated with the birth of the Peronist movement (later to be accused of plotting to assassinate its famous leader). See Weisenburger, 187.
63. See Weisenburger, 138.
64. See Romero, 85.
65. See Andrés Bisso, *El Antifascismo Argentino: Selección Documental y Estudio Preliminar* (Buenos Aires: CeDInCI Editores/Buenos Libros, 2007) and *Acción Argentina: Un Antifascismo Nacional en Tiempos de Guerra Mundial* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005).

66. Pynchon, March 27, 1964.
67. See Williamson, 213.
68. See Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: a Revolutionary Life* (London: Bantam, 1997), 23. Guevara's name, of course, is a tribute to Argentina's most well-known colloquialism, used by Pynchon in a sentence that is repeated twice in the novel: "*Pero ché, no sós argentino . . .*" ["But hey man, you're not Argentinean"] (264, 384).
69. A kind of wandering minstrel "who sings his improvised verses accompanied by a guitar." See Emily Stewart, "Glossary of Gauchesque Terms," in Hernández, *Martín Fierro*, 330.
70. Columba, 5.
71. With this in mind, note Cowart's argument that the "vaunted 'tedesco' blood" of the Gaucho in *V.* is meant to remind us of Argentina's "reputation for harboring unsavory German émigrés." See *Allusion*, 16.
72. Pynchon, June 2, 1963.
73. See Newton, 106.
74. Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: How Péron Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* (London and New York: Granta, 2002), 8–9.
75. *Ibid.*, xx.
76. *Ibid.*, 100.
77. *Ibid.*, xx–xxi.
78. Tanner, for example, notes that Borges, "always important for Pynchon," is "finally named" in *Gravity's Rainbow*. See *Contemporary Writers: Thomas Pynchon* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), 75.
79. See Pöhlmann, 67, 143, 169.
80. Deborah A. Castillo, "Borges and Pynchon: The Tenuous Symmetries of Art," in *New Essays on The Crying of Lot 49*, ed. Patrick O'Donnell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 22.
81. Pynchon, June 2, 1963.
82. Mendelson, 16.
83. Note the suggestion that "El fin" (inspired by the singing duel in the *Martín Fierro*) directly influences "the characterization of three of the novel's principal characters: Tchitcherine, his black half-brother Enzian, and Slothrop himself." See Carole A. Holdsworth, "Versiones, Perversiones: Borges and Pynchon on The *Martín Fierro* Theme," *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 14–15 (1987), 97–104, at 100.
84. Williamson, 142.
85. *Ibid.*, 143.
86. *Ibid.*, 145.
87. *Ibid.*, 156. The review was published in the literary journal *Martín Fierro*, obviously named after Hernández's poem. Anthologies of the journal were available in the US during the 60s and 70s.
88. Weisenburger, 187.
89. Jaime Alazraki, "Enumerations as Evocations: On the Use of a Device in Borges' Latest Poetry," *Borges the Poet*, ed. Carlos Cortínez (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1986), 149–157, at 153.

90. See Williamson, 300.
91. Pynchon, June 29, 1963
92. Beyond the fabricated/ refracted poem, Pynchon's reference to "sunsets south of Rivadavia, where the true South begins" (263) is lifted directly from Borges's "El Sur."
93. Williamson, 161–162.
94. Ibid., 15.
95. See Mark Frisch, *You Might Be Able To Get There From Here: Reconsidering Borges and the Postmodern* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 2004), 127.
96. Mendelson, 16.
97. Ibid., 16. Note that Holdsworth offers a similar argument to mine in responding to critics who see a clearer socio-political agenda in Pynchon. While this assertion is clearly true on one level, Pynchon and Borges cannot be distanced from each other with such apparent ease in the sense that both are writers of "historical fictions" and both trade in "the unique fears" of the twentieth-century. See Holdsworth, 103.
98. Pynchon, June 29, 1963
99. Daniel Balderston, *Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges* (Durham and London: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 15.
100. Carlos Fuentes, qtd. in Amy K. Kaminsky, *Argentina: Stories for a Nation* (Minneapolis and London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 33, 237.
101. "You've become a man—better than a man, a gaucho." See Ricardo Güiraldes, *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926; [rpt.] Buenos Aires: Stockcero, 2004), 160.
102. Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to Gravity's Rainbow* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1987), 39.
103. Kaminsky, 32. My italics.
104. Qtd. in Slatta, *Vanishing Frontier*, 189.
105. Kaminsky, 32.
106. Slatta, *Cowboys*, 32.
107. See, for example, the title story of Bolaño's collection *El Gaucho Insufrible* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2003).
108. See Josefina Ludmer, *El Género Gauchesco: Un Tratado Sobre La Patria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1988).
109. Timothy Barnard, "La casa del ángel," in *South American Cinema: A Critical Filmography, 1915–1994*, ed. Timothy Barnard and Peter Rist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1998), 28–29.
110. The surname of Pynchon's Graciela (Imago Portales or "Image Portal") therefore takes on a specifically cinematic resonance if this connection is a direct one.
111. *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro* (dir. Enrique Dawi, 1974).
112. Rural Argentine terms used in *Martín Fierro*. Both designate varieties of general stores which would also double as social hubs, drinking holes and card dens. See Stewart, 325, 330.
113. Hernández, 119. Trans. Stewart.